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Mine Action and Development

The author explains why he thinks the international mine action and broader development communities are moving in the right direction by mainstreaming mine action into development programs where the degree of landmine contamination warrants.

by Earl Turcotte [Foreign Affairs Canada]

Landmines are victim-triggered weapons that injure or kill on contact. They are indiscriminate by nature, making no distinction among enemy combatants, farmers at work, or children at play. Nor do they cease to be a threat when a conflict has ended. The vast majority of mine incidents involve civilians who are killed or injured post-conflict, often many decades after the formal cessation of hostilities.

It is speculated that since 1975, there have been more than a million landmine casualties worldwide. While the number of incidents continues to drop as countries accede to the Ottawa Convention² banning anti-personnel mines—146 at the time of this writing—there are still between 15,000 and 20,000 direct casualties each year.³ There is also increasing evidence that many more—possibly **many times more**—suffer and die as a result of the indirect, but equally lethal, impact of landmines as an obstacle to sustainable development.⁴

In addition to threatening life and limb, landmines inhibit rehabilitation and reconstruction, agriculture, water supply, education, and industrial and commercial development. They prevent the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons, and impose significant and unnecessary costs on health systems already stretched to or beyond capacity. They breed instability and insecurity and terrorize entire populations. For these and a host of other reasons, mine action is very much a development issue, and there is no doubt that in many affected countries, effective mine action can contribute a great deal to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.⁵

With increased awareness of the links between mine action and the achievement of the MDGs, mine-affected, developing states have begun to establish mine action as a **development** priority as well as a humanitarian, security and human rights priority, and are giving it due



prominence in their national development plans, strategies and budgets. When domestic resources are inadequate, some have put it forward as a critically important area of activity to be considered for support by the international community. In response, numerous bilateral, multilateral and civil-society development agencies have begun to integrate or “mainstream” mine action into their regular programs—both as a sector of development unto itself, and as a means to advance work in more traditional sectors. Notably, in 2004, the World Bank identified mine action as a development imperative.⁶

“We renew our unwavering commitment to achieving the goal of a world free of anti-personnel landmines, in which there will be zero new victims.”¹

Development: Much More Than a Healthy GDP

The integration of mine action in the broader developmental agenda reflects further evolution in our understanding of “development” and what it takes for it to be achieved. Among the many lessons that almost half a century of international development cooperation has taught is that “development” is an increasingly inclusive notion—much more than a healthy gross domestic product—and “human-centered development” requires a multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach. It is not enough that people have nutritious food, potable water and shelter from the elements. We also need a clean environment, adequate health care, education and the means to provide for ourselves and our loved ones over the long term. We need to live in societies where rule of law prevails, where civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are respected, where we are free to move about in safety, and so on. To fully develop, therefore, we must create the conditions under which a very wide range of physical, psychological and other needs can be met on an ongoing basis.

If one embraces this broad concept of development, immediately obvious is the relative artificiality of any categorical divide between traditional “peace and security” and “development” concerns. At minimum, we are compelled to acknowledge the reciprocal relationship between the two, as one is almost invariably a necessary condition for the other. Perhaps more appropriately, we should regard them as largely one and the same and structure our interventions accordingly. To this end, several countries have begun to take what is now commonly called the “3-D” approach on many international files by forging strategic alliances and, in some cases, full partnerships at the national and international levels in the

areas of diplomacy, defence and development. This is an ambitious undertaking but one that promises to generate real synergy and hard results over time.

The foregoing also underlines the softness of the distinction between the so-called “developed” and “developing” worlds. We are all “developing,” albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

Positive Changes

It is a tragic fact that in the heat of battle and the fog of war even the most responsible and disciplined of

“A child who dies of diarrhoeal disease because the only clean water source in an area is mined or of malnutrition because farmers’ fields are mine-contaminated is no less a mine victim than the child struck down directly by a landmine.”

the world’s militaries, intentionally or unintentionally, have used weapons of a type and in a manner that do not always comply with international humanitarian law. It is incumbent upon the international community, therefore, to address the most egregious weapons—weapons that by design and/or the way they are commonly used are prone to indiscriminate effects and cause high collateral damage.

By any standard, the Ottawa Convention is a remarkable achievement in the annals of international disarmament, humanitarian and development cooperation. It constitutes concrete action and makes manifest several of the core principles governing the conduct of war put forward so magnificently in the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols.

But by no means is this the only area of progress. Some of the same states and others, through the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons,⁸ have established protocols that ban laser blinding weapons and incendiary weapons, among others. At the current time, these states are actively engaged in the search for instruments and measures to address adequately the often-horrific impact on civilian populations of anti-vehicle mines, cluster munitions and the like.

Yet other fora are grappling with special challenges presented by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (at roughly 639 million and counting), other conventional weapons and, most terrifying of all, weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

The face of war is changing. More often than not, combatants are indistinguishable from and intermingled with civilian populations. Even when they are not, today’s battlefield is tomorrow’s village, roadway or farmer’s field. Fighting such wars in a manner that respects this reality requires weapons that:

1. Render appropriate force
2. Are reliable
3. Can be carefully targeted to minimize the risk to civilians

It also requires the unwavering determination of those who have these weapons to use them responsibly.

Portions of this article have been abstracted from earlier work by the writer for the United Nations Development Programme. ♦

See “References and Endnotes,” page 105



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Endnotes

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1. From the 2004 *Nairobi Declaration by States Parties to the Ottawa Convention*.
2. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*. Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed Nov. 4, 2005.
3. *Landmine Monitor Report 2005*. International Campaign to Ban Landmines. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2005/findings.html>.
4. These individuals are often called landmine survivors. For a complete definition, see <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/intro/survivor>, accessed Dec. 2, 2005.
5. On Sept. 18, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted *Resolution 55/2, the United Nations Millennium Declaration*. At the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders agreed to a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. Placed at the heart of the global agenda, they are now called the Millennium Development Goals. The Summit's *Millennium Declaration* also outlined a wide range of commitments in human rights, good governance and democracy. See <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf>. Accessed Nov. 4, 2005.
6. World Bank. "Landmine Contamination: A Development Imperative," Social Development Note No. 20, October 2004. Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit.
7. Information on the Geneva Conventions can be found at <http://www.genevaconventions.org/>. Accessed Nov. 4, 2005.
8. Information on the *Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects* can be found at <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/500?OpenDocument>. Accessed Nov. 4, 2005.